NEW MEXICO HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 16, 2007
To: Legislative Education Study Committee Members
            Chair: Representative Rick Miera
From: Len Malry, Director of Workforce Education
Re: The Workforce Education Division and Career Clusters

Thank you for the opportunity to present before the Legislative Education Study Committee. Your work is important. As Director of the New Mexico Higher Education Department's Workforce Education Division, I recognize the value of a commitment from higher education to further your work and look forward to demonstrating our ability to help students succeed. The following information aims to provide general information on the new division and a status report on where we are and our next steps as they relate to the development of the state's career cluster initiative.

Workforce Education Division

The mission of the Workforce Education Division is to serve as a leader and catalyst for positioning our colleges and universities as effective educational agents in workforce and economic development.

- *Collaboration*: champion synergistic partnerships with business, education & government.
- *Communication*: provide access to a national network for information exchange.
- *Research*: conduct, support, and disseminates pertinent research.
- *Policymaking*: serve as an advocate to federal and state legislators and policy makers.

Background

The necessary elements for regional economic success depend on how well communities cultivate and retain "knowledge workers." These are individuals who possess postsecondary educational credentials, technical skills, the ability to learn rapidly and an entrepreneurial approach to work and career management.

The Workforce Education Division is designed to help better align our educational system with economic development and help both systems be more responsive to the labor market.

Some regions within our state can attract knowledge workers by virtue of their natural amenities. Most cannot. They have to "grow their own" talent. This challenge presents a catch-22 for rural areas: the absence of good jobs provides few incentives for residents to get an education, while low levels of education and skill in the local workforce constrains the ability of these communities to attract and retain good jobs.

Given increasingly limited public resources and the importance of education and training to the economic health of regions, maximizing the return on the public's investment in education must be a top priority for policymakers. For this to happen, education at every level needs to be more closely aligned with current and future workforce and economic development efforts.

The initial step in this process has been the establishment of the state's target career clusters. But what are the next steps? We have begun to work closely with the Public Education Department (PED), the Economic Development Department (EDD), the Department of Workforce Solutions (DWS), and other business organizations in an effort to develop a seamless educational system that is responsive to industry needs.

What We Have Done

- Utilizing the occupational information network (O-Net), we've developed a list of occupations and categorized them by our target seven career clusters. The (O-Net) is a data product developed by job analysts that provides information on job duties, knowledge and skills, education and training, and other occupational characteristics that comes directly from workers and employers. There are currently 812 occupations. For example, within the Health Cluster, there are more than 60 occupational career fields.

- Utilizing various data sources including standard Labor Market Information from the DWS, computer software tools, economic forecasting models, and information from local economic development representatives, we are establishing more accurate, localized data on current demand for job openings. Then using population growth projections we can better predict future demand.

- We've cross walked our Classification of Instructional Programs or CIP codes with our seven target career clusters. The purpose of the CIP codes is to provide a means of accurate tracking, assessment, and reporting of fields of study and program completions activity. The identification of degree offerings by career cluster will allow better student tracking capabilities.

- We've cross walked specific program offerings by each two-year and four-year institution in the state with our target seven career clusters.

- With assistance from PED we will cross walk the existing career pathway programs within our high schools and branch/two-year institutions with our target seven career clusters. This will be the starting point as we then will map out the pathways to higher degree program offerings at the four-year institutions.

Next Steps

- Improve Occupational Information: This involves more than the addition of data elements such as career cluster assignments. While the need for occupational prioritization based on worker demand remains, occupations no longer rise to prominence due exclusively to a strong worker demand. The interrelation of demand, training and wages is also important. Thus, a particular occupation with only average worker demand may be prioritized due to extensive training requirements or high wages.

- We will continue to monitor existing program offerings by institutions on a local level throughout the state, including distance learning offerings.

- We will work more closely with our partners at PED, our public institutions, DWS and industry to evaluate the performance of the existing pathway programs and track these individuals into the workforce. Some of this information may include:
  -The number and composition of students enrolled in these programs
  -Retention rates of the students
  -Number of those entering workforce in that pathway field
  -Industry satisfaction with program offerings and quality of worker(s)

- Consistent with "data driven decision making," we will utilize the data we have gathered to determine which career cluster industries and pathway programs are better suited for further development and sustainability.

- Long term, we must determine how best to position ourselves for future global economic competitiveness. Similar to a "spec" warehouse, we want to develop a "spec" workforce, one with transferable skill sets and competencies that are attractive to many industries. Therefore identifying the critical core competencies and skill sets needed to succeed in the twenty first century is integral in positioning our schools to meet that need.

Potential Strategies
- Select one "pilot" career pathway program in one local region that would start in middle school and continue through high school, two-year, four-year institution through to the workforce. An example may be in the nursing field, a demonstrated "in demand occupation." This would require the leveraging of several resources including state, federal, and private funds.

- Industry Skills Panels: One strategy is the fostering of existing and the development of new industry skills alliances or panels. There are currently alliances in the Albuquerque area addressing the Health as well as Engineering, Construction, and Manufacturing sectors. There is a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) alliance formed in the Las Cruces area. There are alliances being formed in the Aviation/Aerospace industry and another in the Digital Media sector (Arts and Entertainment cluster).